



The Impact of Religiosity on the Sexual Behaviors of College Students

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ABSTRACT

Sexuality is considered by most religious traditions to represent general temptation, procreation or a way to strengthen emotional bonds. The purpose of this study was to determine if frequency of religious attendance and perceived degree of religiosity could distinguish between those students who have and have not participated in selected sexual behaviors. Data were collected from a convenience sample of undergraduate students ($n = 408$) at a southeastern university. Students voluntarily completed a questionnaire in a regular classroom setting. The questionnaire elicited information regarding the frequency of attendance at religious services, perceived strength of religious feelings, perception of God's view of sex, and participation in the following sexual behaviors: sexual intercourse (ever, last year and last month), giving oral sex (ever and last month), receiving oral sex (ever and last month), and anal sex (ever). Data were analyzed using both univariate analysis (chi-square and analysis of variance) and logistic regression. Results indicated that religiosity variables, especially frequency of religious attendance and religious feelings, were significant predictors of sexual behavior. Results should be considered by those working with college students in the area of human sexuality.

INTRODUCTION

Religion, by definition, is a conservative force based upon a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe. These beliefs are mainly based on traditions involving scriptures, prophecy and revelations that have been incorporated into the theories behind a particular religion. The difficulty with religion and traditional beliefs is that they are slow to change; however, the world is ever-changing. Religion, along with peers, parents and the media, is a primary socialization agent for youth. Most conventional religions strongly discourage premarital sexual activity, permissiveness and adultery. Further-

more, the majority of religious teachings are based upon the assumptions that the major purpose of sex is procreation.¹⁻³ In contrast to these generally prohibitive sexual ideologies, popular culture and mass media often promote sexual ideals that are mainly characterized by sexual pleasure.

A great deal of research effort has been conducted on understanding variables that influence premarital sexual activity among college students. It has been documented that college students engage in a number of behaviors that place them at risk for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy.⁴ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

individuals are more likely to be sexually active during emerging adulthood compared to when in high school, but they are also less likely to use condoms.⁵ A study by Reinisch, Hill, Sanders and Ziemba-Davis

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revealed that college students participate in comparatively higher levels of risky behaviors, including unprotected sexual intercourse with casual partners.⁶ It has also been reported that college students are more accepting of casual sex and experience less sex-related guilt than their younger counterparts.⁷ Many college students report adequate knowledge about STIs; however, many do not feel they are at personal risk.⁸ According to a study by DiClemente, Forrest and Mickler, despite high levels of HIV/AIDS knowledge, only 8% of college students reported using condoms each time they had sexual intercourse.⁹

Many college students report making an effort to reduce risky behaviors; however, DiClemente and his co-workers found that most had multiple sex partners and had not used condoms in the previous year.⁹ Additionally, they found that 37% of students who had engaged in heterosexual intercourse during the previous year had never used a condom; and approximately two-thirds used condoms during fewer than 50% of their sexual episodes. The majority of research findings among college students indicate risky behavior in the form of inconsistent or no condom use, multiple lifetime sexual partners,⁸ and alcohol and other drug use combined with sexual activity.¹⁰

The dimensions of religiosity and sexuality have been shown to be closely associated. Religion plays a large role with regard to sexual decision making. Many studies have used reference group theory^{11,12} to explain associations between religiosity and sexual behaviors and attitudes. The theory states that individuals' sexual behaviors and attitudes stem from their religious teachings. Thus, according to reference group theory, identifying with religious teachings will lead an individual to avoid certain types of sexual behavior. Another important factor to consider is whether religiosity is intrinsic (deeply held and a primary motivator for action) or extrinsic (a superficial social motivator for action). The stronger or more deeply held an adolescent's religious beliefs, the more likely religiosity will influence his or her sexual behavior

and attitudes.¹³

Faulkner and DeJong¹⁴ indicated that religiosity encompasses five different dimensions: (1) ritualistic, which focuses on religious behavior as reading religious literature, (2) experiential, which refers to purpose in life and the importance of faith, (3) ideological, which refers to religious beliefs as the idea of deity, (4) intellectual, which deals with religious knowledge, and (5) consequential, which deals with the impact of one's beliefs on his or her secular activities. Fox and Young utilized a multidimensional religiosity scale and found that virgins indicated a greater degree of religiosity, when compared to non-virgins, in three of five different dimensions (ritualistic, experiential, and consequential).¹⁵ Results suggest that virgins reported a greater degree of sexual guilt and religious commitment than their non-virgin counterparts.

Research suggests that religious individuals engage in first sexual intercourse at a later age than their non-religious counterparts.^{16,17} Much of the literature on predicting sexual behaviors has focused upon coital debut, with results suggesting that age may be the most consistent predictor of first sexual intercourse. However, many other variables such as gender, race, social status and religious context have been documented.^{11,18} In a review of over 250 studies conducted between 1980 and 1999, Kirby found 13 different clusters of antecedents on the topic of sexual risk-taking behavior.¹⁹ One of these clusters was attachment to religious institutions. Religiosity was defined as a protective factor, since it was associated with delaying the initiation of sexual intercourse and with reporting fewer sex partners.^{2,19}

A recent study found that across 52 cultures religiosity was positively correlated with self-described sexual restraint among men ($n = 6,982$; $r = 0.22$) and women ($n = 9,763$; $r = 0.25$).³ Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels found that individuals who reported their religious affiliation as "none" had more sexual partners than those who reported a religious affiliation.²⁰ Furthermore, Cochran and Beeghley reported

increasingly stronger religiosity effects on attitudes toward premarital sex as denominational commitment increased.²¹ Similarly, results of another study found that frequency of certain sexual behaviors and the extensiveness of those sexual experiences decreased as religious intensity increased.²² Empirical evidence demonstrates that strength of religious conviction and participation in religious activities are more important than religious denomination or affiliation in predicting whether or not an individual has sex.¹⁶ Thus, for the present study we decided to measure frequency of attendance at worship services and self-reported religiosity.

Most studies that have examined the relationship between sexual behaviors and religiosity have focused on sexual intercourse and have not examined other behaviors. In this study we addressed not only participation in sexual intercourse but also giving and receiving oral sex and participation in anal sex. Of known STI risk behaviors, anal intercourse among college women is reported to be the least studied. The available data suggest a higher incidence of anal intercourse among college women compared with the general adult female population.²³ Flannery et al., found that almost one-third (32%) of sexually experienced college women ($n = 761$) reported that they had engaged in anal intercourse.²³

Over the past several decades sexual and religious trends have generated a great deal of research interest and policy. Moralistic and political arguments cite a degeneration of values as the major source of the trend toward earlier sexual activity. Furthermore, many studies state that individuals are less likely to attend worship services today than in past decades.^{16,17} Evidence confirms that attitudes regarding premarital sex have become more permissive over time.¹⁷ Thus, the extent to which religiosity still influences sexual behavior provides a backdrop for the study.

The purpose of this study was to determine if a set of variables measuring different aspects of religiosity could differentiate between those students who had and had



not participated in selected sexual behaviors. The researchers hypothesized that frequency of worship services and degree of religiosity would distinguish between those who had participated in certain sexual behaviors and those who had not engaged in selected sexual activities.

METHODS

Participants

Data were collected from a convenience sample of undergraduate students enrolled in health science courses at a southeastern university. Participation in the study was voluntary and all subjects remained anonymous. All students attending class on the days data were collected were provided with the opportunity to participate in the study. Few students declined the opportunity to participate. The estimated response rate was greater than 90%.

Testing Instrument

The questionnaire used in the study included measures of sexual behavior, religiosity, and other health behaviors, as well as several demographic variables. For the purpose of this study, students were asked about their participation (yes or no) in the following sexual behaviors: 1) sexual intercourse ever, 2) sexual intercourse in the last year, 3) sexual intercourse in the last month, 4) giving oral sex ever, 5) giving oral sex in the last month, 6) receiving oral sex ever, 7) receiving oral sex in the last month, and 8) anal intercourse ever. These items are commonly used in studies regarding sexual behavior, except relatively few studies have examined participation in anal sex.²³ The questionnaire also included the following religiosity variables: frequency of attendance at worship services (ritualistic dimension); five categories ranging from "never" to "more than once per week" and 2) degree of religious feelings (experiential dimension); five categories ranging from "deeply religious" to "not at all religious." Again, items such as these have been frequently used as measures of religiosity. They address what Faulkner and DeJong called the ritualistic and experiential dimensions of religiosity.¹⁴

In addition, we utilized two unique scales titled "I think God has a positive view of sex" and "I think God has a negative view of sex" (these scales address religiosity's ideological dimension).¹⁴ The three items from the negative God scale were worded in a restrictive fashion (only for procreation; is a sin; would not be approved) and the three items from the positive God scale were worded in a positive manner (should be enjoyed; for mutual enjoyment; approved of). An example of an item from the positive scale is "sexuality is a gift of God and should be enjoyed." An example from the negative scale is "participation in sexual activities solely for pleasure is a sin." Adequate reliability of the items (Cronbach's alpha = .63) was reported in previous research,²⁴ where the items were used as a single six item scale reflecting participants' perception of God's view of sex. Since the researchers were studying sexuality within the context of marriage, each of the items was prefaced with the phrase "within the context of marriage." Additionally in that study, factor analysis did show the existence of two distinct factors (positive and negative views) but was not reported. In this study we also used factor analysis and again detected two

distinct factors (Table 1). Internal consistency was found to be adequate for both scales (negative scale – Cronbach's alpha = .73, positive scale – Cronbach's alpha = .64).

Procedure

Participants voluntarily completed a questionnaire during normally scheduled class times. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted prior to implementation of the study.

Data Analysis

Researchers utilized SAS programs to complete the data analysis. This included descriptive analyses and basic frequency counts. In addition, data were analyzed using univariate analysis (ANOVA and chi-square) as well as logistic regression. For each sexual behavior, separate logistic regression analyses were conducted for males and females. In each case, the four religiosity variables served as predictor variables. The level of significance was set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Sample

The majority of the survey participants were female (71%). Relative to class in school, juniors were the largest group of

Table 1. Factor Loadings: Perception of God's View of Sex

| Factor – God Has a Negative View of Sex | |
|---|----------------|
| Questionnaire Item | Factor Loading |
| Participation in sexual activities other than penile-vaginal intercourse would not be approved of by God | .748 |
| God intended sex to be only for procreation | .768 |
| Participation in sexual activities solely for pleasure is a sin | .826 |
| Factor – God Has a Positive View of Sex | |
| Questionnaire Item | Factor Loading |
| God regards reproduction as only one purpose of sexual activity; it is also for mutual enjoyment and pleasure | .844 |
| Sexuality is a gift of God, and as such should be enjoyed | .831 |
| Any sexual activity that is agreeable and pleasurable to both partners is approved of by God | .500 |



respondents (32%), with sophomores (27%) and seniors (24%) being the second and third largest groups. Freshmen comprised the smallest group of participants (17%). The majority of participants were Caucasian (84%), while African-Americans accounted for 11 percent. The remaining 5 percent included Asian, American Indian/Pacific Islander, and other race/ethnicities.

There were gender differences in regard to religious attendance ($p=.002$) and religious feeling ($p=.006$) with females reporting more frequent attendance and greater religious feeling. More than one-third of the females (37.1%), but less than one-fourth of the males (20.7%), reported attending worship services at least once per week. More than half of the females considered themselves to be religious (57.3%) or deeply religious (11.9%). This compared to less than half of the males (42.1% religious, 5.1% deeply religious).

Males were more likely than females to report ever participating in sexual intercourse (83.9% vs. 68.7%, $p=.002$), ever giving oral sex (87.7% vs. 77.7%, $p=.023$) and receiving oral sex in the last month (53.3% vs. 41.6%, $p=.013$). More complete data relative to the religiosity and participation in various sexual behavior variables, by gender, are shown in Table 2.

Sexual Behavior, Worship Attendance, and Religious Feelings—Females

Data for ordinal level variables (frequency of worship attendance and degree of religious feelings) were analyzed using chi-square. Data for interval level variables (God's positive view of sex and God's negative view of sex) were analyzed using two-way (gender x behavior) analysis of variance. These results are presented in Table 3.

Results for females indicated that behavior was not independent ($p < .05$) of frequency of worship attendance. This was true for all eight sexual behavior variables. Those who attended worship services less frequently were more likely to report participation in the behavior than those who attended more frequently. Additionally, results indicated that behavior was not

independent of degree of religious feeling. This was true for seven of the eight sexual behaviors. Only for "receiving oral sex in last month" was religious feeling found to be independent ($p = 0.1399$) of behavior. For the other seven behaviors, those who indicated stronger religious feelings were less likely to report participation in the behaviors than those indicating less religious feelings.

Sexual Behavior, Worship Attendance, and Religious Feelings—Males

Results for males indicated that behavior was not independent of frequency of worship attendance for three of the eight sexual behavior variables (participation in sexual intercourse in the last year, giving oral sex ever, and receiving oral sex in the last month). Degree of religious feeling was found not to be independent for two of the eight behavior variables (participation in sexual intercourse in the last year and receiving oral sex in the last month). For these variables for which significant results were obtained, the pattern was similar to that shown for females. Those reporting less frequent worship attendance and weaker religious feelings were more likely to report participation in the behavior than those indicating more frequent worship attendance and stronger religious feelings.

Sexual Behaviors and Perceptions of God's View of Sex

Results from these analyses revealed significant main effects for behavior for having given oral sex in the last month and God's positive view of sex, and significant behavior x gender interactions for: (1) Giving oral sex in the last month and God's positive view of sex. Males who reported giving oral sex in the last month had the lowest score relative to God's positive view of sex. Males who reported that they had not given oral sex in the last month had the highest score on God's positive view of sex. (2) Participating in sexual intercourse within the last month and God's negative view of sex. Males who reported they had not participated in sexual intercourse in the last month had the highest score relative

to God's negative view of sex. Males who reported participation in sexual intercourse in the last month and females (both those who had and had not participated in intercourse in the last month) had low scores. (3) Participation in anal sex and God's positive view of sex. Males who indicated they had participated in anal sex had the lowest score relative to God's positive view of sex. Males who indicated they had not participated in anal sex had the highest score relative to anal sex. Females who indicated they had not participated had a much lower score.

Logistic Regression

To determine whether the religiosity variables could, as a set, distinguish between students who had engaged in the sexual behaviors examined in this study and those who had not, a logistic regression was conducted for each of the eight behaviors. Separate analyses were conducted for males and females. Results for females are shown in Table 4. Results for males are shown in Table 5. For seven of the eight behaviors for females, and for six of the eight behaviors for males, results indicated that the set of variables did distinguish between those who reported engaging in the behavior and those who indicated that they had not engaged in the behavior. Percent concordant values ranged from 53.0% to 80.4%.

For females, frequency of worship attendance added a unique contribution to distinguishing between those who reported participating in a behavior and those reporting they had not participated, for six of the eight behaviors (all but receiving oral sex—ever and in the last month). In each case those who attended services more frequently were less likely to participate in the behavior. Other variables that made unique contributions included God's positive or God's negative view of sex (for both sexual intercourse in the last year and anal sex) and religious feelings (for received oral sex ever).

For males, frequency of worship attendance added unique contributions to distinguishing between those who had and had never participated in sexual intercourse and had ever given oral sex. Those who attended

**Table 2. Frequency Counts: Religiosity and Sexual Behavior Variables by Gender**

| | Males | | Females | | χ^2 | P |
|--|--------|------|---------|------|----------|-------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | | |
| Religious Feeling | | | | | | |
| Deeply religious | 6 | 5.1 | 34 | 11.9 | 19.691 | 0.006 |
| Religious | 48 | 42.1 | 164 | 57.3 | | |
| Somewhat religious | 38 | 33.3 | 60 | 21.0 | | |
| Not very religious | 16 | 14.0 | 6 | 5.6 | | |
| Not at all religious | 6 | 5.3 | 12 | 4.2 | | |
| Religious Attendance | | | | | | |
| Never | 6 | 5.2 | 24 | 8.4 | 23.705 | 0.002 |
| 1-11 times a year | 34 | 29.3 | 50 | 17.5 | | |
| Once a month | 30 | 25.9 | 36 | 12.6 | | |
| 2-3 times a month | 22 | 19.0 | 70 | 24.5 | | |
| Once a week | 16 | 13.8 | 64 | 22.4 | | |
| More than once a week | 8 | 6.9 | 42 | 14.7 | | |
| Had sexual intercourse ever | | | | | | |
| Yes | 94 | 83.9 | 195 | 68.7 | 9.494 | 0.002 |
| No | 18 | 16.1 | 89 | 31.3 | | |
| Had sexual intercourse last year | | | | | | |
| Yes | 83 | 74.1 | 185 | 65.6 | 2.665 | 0.103 |
| No | 29 | 25.9 | 97 | 4.4 | | |
| Had sexual intercourse last month | | | | | | |
| Yes | 54 | 49.1 | 138 | 48.6 | 0.008 | 0.929 |
| No | 56 | 50.9 | 146 | 51.4 | | |
| Given oral sex ever | | | | | | |
| Yes | 100 | 87.7 | 216 | 77.7 | 5.195 | 0.023 |
| No | 14 | 12.3 | 62 | 22.3 | | |
| Given oral sex last month | | | | | | |
| Yes | 45 | 40.2 | 116 | 41.7 | 0.079 | 0.779 |
| No | 67 | 59.8 | 162 | 58.3 | | |
| Received oral sex ever | | | | | | |
| Yes | 100 | 87.7 | 230 | 82.1 | 1.852 | 0.174 |
| No | 14 | 12.3 | 50 | 17.9 | | |
| Received oral sex last month | | | | | | |
| Yes | 63 | 55.3 | 116 | 41.6 | 6.112 | 0.013 |
| No | 51 | 44.7 | 163 | 58.4 | | |
| Participated in anal sex ever | | | | | | |
| Yes | 20 | 17.7 | 40 | 14.2 | 0.749 | 0.387 |
| No | 93 | 82.3 | 241 | 85.8 | | |

services more often were less likely to participate in the behavior. God's positive or negative view of sex added a unique contribution to sexual intercourse in the last month, and only God's positive view of sex added a unique contribution to having given oral sex in the last month. Religious

feelings added a unique contribution to ever having given oral sex.

DISCUSSION

Results of the univariate analysis indicated that for females frequency of attendance at worship services was significantly

related to participation in all eight sexual behaviors; religious feeling was related to seven of the eight behaviors. For males, attendance at worship services was significantly related to three of the eight behaviors; religious feeling was related to two of the eight. Perception of God's view of sex

**Table 3. Results of Univariate Analyses of Religiosity Variables By Sexual Behavior Participation**

| | Sexual Intercourse | | | | Given Oral Sex | | | | Received Oral Sex | | | | Anal Sex | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------|-----------|--------|----------------|--------|----------|--------|-------------------|--------|----------|--------|------------|--------|----------|--------|
| | Ever | | Last Year | | Last Month | | Ever | | Last Month | | Ever | | Last Month | | Ever | |
| | χ^2 | P | χ^2 | P | χ^2 | P | χ^2 | P | χ^2 | P | χ^2 | P | χ^2 | P | χ^2 | P |
| Frequency of Attendance | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Males | 3.85 | 0.5712 | 17.94 | 0.003 | 7.79 | 0.168 | 14.00 | 0.016 | 3.801 | 0.578 | 6.117 | 0.295 | 17.356 | 0.004 | 10.262 | 0.068 |
| Females | 48.65 | <.0001 | 46.85 | <.0001 | 50.81 | <.0001 | 31.64 | <.0001 | 31.68 | <.0001 | 39.05 | <.0001 | 37.80 | <.0001 | 24.01 | 0.0002 |
| Religious Feeling | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Males | 8.95 | 0.062 | 13.18 | 0.010 | 5.89 | 0.207 | 5.50 | 0.239 | 6.65 | 0.155 | 7.93 | 0.094 | 12.50 | 0.014 | 9.26 | 0.055 |
| Females | 28.79 | <.0001 | 21.60 | 0.0002 | 24.29 | <.0001 | 19.05 | 0.0008 | 19.48 | 0.0006 | 30.48 | <.0001 | 6.94 | 0.1389 | 9.97 | 0.041 |
| | Sexual Intercourse | | | | Given Oral Sex | | | | Received Oral Sex | | | | Anal Sex | | | |
| | Ever | | Last Year | | Last Month | | Ever | | Last Month | | Ever | | Last Month | | Ever | |
| | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| God's Positive View of Sex | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mean | 8.31 | 8.69 | 8.27 | 8.74 | 8.29 | 8.53 | 8.37 | 8.47 | 8.29 | 8.48 | 8.36 | 8.72 | 8.37 | 8.43 | 8.59 | 8.90 |
| SD | 1.89 | 1.34 | 1.91 | 1.33 | 1.89 | 1.65 | 1.85 | 1.40 | 1.89 | 1.70 | 1.81 | 1.41 | 1.81 | 1.74 | 1.390 | 1.355 |
| Main Effects Behavior | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F | 2.07 | | 3.32 | | 1.57 | | 0.47 | | 3.96 | | 2.34 | | 0.68 | | 0.12 | |
| P | 0.151 | | 0.069 | | 0.211 | | 0.493 | | 0.047 | | 0.127 | | 0.410 | | 0.729 | |
| Gender x Behavior Interaction | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F | 0.05 | | 0.28 | | 0.91 | | 0.26 | | 6.68 | | 0.42 | | 0.99 | | 7.34 | |
| P | 0.826 | | 0.594 | | 0.341 | | 0.613 | | 0.010 | | 0.516 | | 0.320 | | 0.0007 | |
| God's Negative View of Sex | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mean | 6.25 | 5.81 | 6.21 | 5.88 | 6.07 | 6.23 | 6.13 | 6.16 | 6.20 | 6.08 | 6.05 | 6.57 | 6.22 | 6.05 | 6.36 | 6.11 |
| SD | 2.09 | 1.66 | 2.047 | 1.78 | 2.21 | 1.78 | 1.42 | 2.07 | 1.92 | 2.03 | 1.95 | 2.08 | 1.91 | 2.03 | 2.02 | 1.99 |
| Main Effects Behavior | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F | 2.36 | | 0.75 | | 2.52 | | 0.00 | | 1.14 | | 1.68 | | 0.22 | | 0.71 | |
| P | 0.125 | | 0.388 | | 0.113 | | 0.995 | | 0.286 | | 0.196 | | 0.638 | | 0.400 | |
| Gender x Behavior Interaction | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F | 0.23 | | 0.35 | | 4.05 | | 0.15 | | 1.40 | | 0.38 | | 0.15 | | 0.01 | |
| P | 0.635 | | 0.552 | | 0.045 | | 0.696 | | 0.237 | | 0.536 | | 0.698 | | 0.938 | |

seemed to be less related to behavior. There were significant behavior main effects only for God's positive view of sex and having given oral sex in the last month. Significant behavior by gender interactions were noted for two behaviors. There were no significant main effects for any behaviors with regard to God's negative view of sex. Significant behavior by gender interaction was noted

only for intercourse in the last month.

Results of the logistic regression analyses indicated that, as a set, the religiosity variables were significant predictors of selected sexual behaviors in 13 of the 16 different analyses. The set of religiosity variables was not a factor for males in ever participating in sexual intercourse, nor was it a factor for males or females in having

received oral sex in the last month. For all other behaviors examined, however, religiosity variables distinguished between those who had participated in the behavior and those who had not. Frequency of worship attendance seemed to be the most important distinguishing variable, making a unique contribution to distinguishing between those who did and did not participate in a

**Table 4. Results of Logistic Regression Analyses for Sexual Behavior Variables (Females)**

| | Sexual Intercourse Ever | | Sexual Intercourse Last Year | | Sexual Intercourse Last Month | | Given Oral Sex Ever | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|------------------------|--------|
| | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P |
| Attendance | 13.76 | <.0002 | 14.88 | <.0001 | 15.97 | <.0001 | 5.39 | <.03 |
| Religious Feeling | 0.99 | 0.32 | 0.51 | 0.48 | 0.05 | 0.81 | 0.28 | 0.59 |
| God's Positive View | 3.01 | 0.08 | 3.59 | 0.05 | 2.87 | 0.09 | 0.25 | 0.62 |
| God's Negative View | 2.99 | 0.08 | 5.52 | <.02 | 2.28 | 0.13 | 0.05 | 0.81 |
| Percent Concordant | 75.2% | | 74.7% | | 70.5% | | 66.9% | |
| Overall Chisq & Prob | 35.24 | <.0001 | 37.45 | <.0001 | 32.99 | <.0001 | 12.17 | <.02 |
| | Given Oral Sex Last Month | | Received Oral Sex Ever | | Received Oral Sex Last Month | | Anal Sex Ever | |
| | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P |
| Attendance | 12.38 | <.0004 | 2.71 | 0.09 | 1.72 | 0.19 | 17.24 | <.0001 |
| Religious Feeling | 1.22 | 0.27 | 4.65 | <.04 | 0.45 | 0.50 | 1.16 | 0.28 |
| God's Positive View | 0.04 | 0.85 | 1.88 | 0.17 | 0.02 | 0.88 | 6.93 | <.009 |
| God's Negative View | 0.79 | 0.37 | 3.66 | 0.06 | 0.84 | 0.36 | 9.29 | <.003 |
| Percent Concordant | 63.3% | | 76.2% | | 53.0% | | 75.7% | |
| Overall Chisq & Prob | 15.66 | <.004 | 23.09 | <.0001 | 2.28 | 0.69 | 33.92 | <.0001 |

behavior for six of the eight behaviors for females and four of the eight behaviors for males.

Results of the study support the findings of previous research. Fehring et al., found an inverse relationship with various aspects of religiosity and frequency of coital activity among a population of college students.¹³ In particular, this involved organized religious activity, including church attendance ($r = -.303$) and the importance of prayer ($r = -.230$). The current study similarly found an inverse relationship between frequency of worship attendance and engaging in certain sexual behaviors. Dunne, Edwards, Lucke & Raphael found that among a university sample, those who perceived religion as important in their lives were less likely to participate in sexual intercourse.²⁵ Findings from the literature also suggest that sexual activity and frequency of coitus are inversely related to level of religiosity, religious attendance and importance of faith among college students.^{6,22}

Moreover, Fehring et al., found religiosity to be strongly related to sexual guilt and inversely related to sexual permissiveness among a college population.¹³ A recently published study found five different dimensions of religiosity (identity, behavior, attitudes, perceptions and practice) were associated with sexual attitudes and behaviors in unique ways.¹¹ As in this study, Lefkowitz and colleagues found that religious behavior was the strongest predictor of sexual behavior.¹¹ Thus, overall results of the current study support previous research with regard to the conceptualization that religiosity is associated with fewer sexual behaviors.

Many studies use one-item measures of religiosity, such as frequency of church attendance or single item self-assessments, while other studies suggest that one-item measures fail to capture the multidimensionality of religiosity.¹¹ The current study employed multiple measures of religion; however, overall findings reveal that frequency of religious attendance was the vari-

able most likely to add a unique contribution to the logistic regression analysis.

Interpretation of these results should consider the limitations of the study. Participants consisted of a convenience sample of undergraduate students enrolled in health science classes. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to the university population or youth of similar ages not enrolled in college. Additionally, the current study was cross-sectional and thus correlates of behavior were assessed rather than antecedents of behavior.

CONCLUSION

Religious conviction plays a major role for many individuals with regard to sexuality. Research suggests that differing aspects of religiosity have dissimilar effects on sexual attitudes, risk perception and sexual behavior.^{26,27} Furthermore, it is possible that sexual experiences influence religiosity. For example, Thornton and Camburn indicated that those individuals who engage

**Table 5. Results of Logistic Regression Analyses for Sexual Behavior Variables (Males)**

| | Sexual Intercourse Ever | | Sexual Intercourse Last Year | | Sexual Intercourse Last Month | | Given Oral Sex Ever | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|------|------------------------|-------|
| | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P |
| Attendance | 3.95 | <.05 | 10.23 | <.002 | 0.11 | 0.74 | 10.08 | <.003 |
| Religious Feeling | 1.68 | 0.19 | 0.59 | 0.44 | 3.36 | 0.06 | 6.74 | <.01 |
| God's Positive View | 0.90 | 0.34 | 3.48 | 0.06 | 4.43 | <.04 | 0.04 | 0.84 |
| God's Negative View | 0.09 | 0.76 | 1.36 | 0.24 | 6.64 | <.01 | 0.38 | 0.54 |
| Percent Concordant | 71.4% | | 80.4% | | 65.8% | | 80.2% | |
| Overall Chisq & Prob | 6.67 | 0.15 | 20.26 | <.0005 | 10.32 | <.04 | 13.72 | <.009 |
| | Given Oral Sex Last Month | | Received Oral Sex Ever | | Received Oral Sex Last Month | | Anal Sex Ever | |
| | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P | X ² | P |
| Attendance | 0.10 | 0.76 | 6.66 | <.001 | 2.21 | 0.14 | 0.00 | 0.96 |
| Religious Feeling | 3.33 | 0.06 | 4.91 | <.03 | 6.66 | <.01 | 2.75 | 0.09 |
| God's Positive View | 5.74 | <.02 | 3.12 | 0.08 | 1.99 | 0.16 | 11.05 | <.001 |
| God's Negative View | 0.18 | 0.67 | 0.99 | 0.32 | 0.63 | 0.43 | 7.13 | <.008 |
| Percent Concordant | 66.4% | | 76.5% | | 63.1% | | 78.3% | |
| Overall Chisq & Prob | 11.23 | <.03 | 12.91 | <.02 | 8.30 | 0.08 | 15.94 | <.004 |

in premarital sex become less religiously involved.²⁸ Similarly, there is a possibility that those individuals who engage in short term acts of sexual behavior, or those who commit acts of infidelity, also decrease religious involvement.

Religiosity accounts for a unique variation in two processes critical for the continuation of our species: survival and sexual reproduction. Religiosity seems to affect sexual behavior through a sexual ideology or belief system based upon anticipated negative consequences.² Sexual decisions, while ultimately based upon personal choice, are shaped by the multiple social contexts in which individuals develop. Findings from the study demonstrate that religiosity impacts several dimensions of sexuality in unique ways. Effective programs directed at reducing sexual risk-taking among young adults must address social contexts that often promote dissimilar sexual ideologies. It may be important for

future studies to address multilevel effects and interactions of peers, parents, schools and neighborhoods. Future research may also wish to examine longitudinal relationships between variables, such as religiosity and contraceptive use.

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